



## Florida House of Representatives

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### **HOUSE PROPOSES VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM**

TALLAHASSEE - The Florida House of Representatives is moving forward with a program to implement voter-mandated Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) amendment. After listening to concerns, thoughts and ideas from citizens and officials throughout the state, the House Appropriations Committee passed legislation (strike-all amendment to CS/HB 821) that will create the Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Education Program required by the 2002 constitutional amendment.

“We are obviously very pleased,” said Speaker Johnnie Byrd. “This bill takes on the challenge of a voluntary pre-k program while maintaining our values of less government, lower taxes, individual freedom, personal responsibility, and empowering families.”

#### Choice and Empowerment

Two main goals of this bill are to provide parents with choice and empowerment. The VPK Program is voluntary for parents and providers and is not part of the state system of public education. Parents will be able to choose from any eligible public, private or faith-based provider. The House bill, following the stipulations set out in the state constitution for public pre-k class size teacher to student ratios, requires providers not to exceed the constitutional 1:18 ratio. The bill provides a scholarship to parents of eligible 4-year old children to attend either a 540 hour year long program or a 310 hour summer intensive program.

#### Expectations and Outcomes

The DOE must implement a statewide kindergarten screening instrument that will measure emerging phonemic awareness and phonics skills which are valid and reliable predictors of later reading performance.

#### Governance

The House bill creates the Early Learning Advisory Council, housed within AWI, whose purpose is to advise both DOE and AWI on early childhood education policy. The VPK Program will be established within the Department of Education. Existing early learning programs will be left under the Agency for Workforce Innovation (AWI).

This bill concentrates funds on building a solid educational foundation for children and minimizes bureaucratic waste. It emphasizes phonics, numbers, phonemic awareness and vocabulary. It pays only for instructional hours. Consistent with our principles, we will provide a voluntary pre-kindergarten program implementation plan that fully complies with the constitutional amendment in such a way that: minimizes government bureaucracy and regulation; minimizes cost to Florida’s taxpayers so we can continue to live within our means; and respects the rights, responsibility, and autonomy of parents to choose their children’s pre-kindergarten education.

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